

Asbury Theological Seminary ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange

Syllabi

eCommons

1-1-2002

ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology

Lawrence W. Wood

Follow this and additional works at: <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/syllabi>

Recommended Citation

Wood, Lawrence W., "ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology" (2002). *Syllabi*. Book 2164.
<http://place.asburyseminary.edu/syllabi/2164>

This Document is brought to you for free and open access by the eCommons at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. For more information, please contact thad.horner@asburyseminary.edu.

SYLLABUS FOR ST501
TUESDAY AND THURSDAY 8:00-9:15 AM
M308
Larry Wood, Professor

ST 501 METHOD AND PRAXIS IN THEOLOGY.

This is an introductory course relating method to practice in theology. This course will involve an examination of different ways in which the Christian tradition has understood the sources, norms, and criteria for the development of church doctrine. Special attention is given to a critical analysis of contemporary theological methods and the influence of postmodern science. The connection between theological method and Christian doctrine, especially the doctrine of divine revelation, will serve as the foundation for developing an Evangelical\Wesleyan theology in the postmodern world. This class is designed for beginning students, and it serves as preparatory study for all course offerings in theology and doctrine.

Wesley once said to his preacher that the study of logic was the single, most important study next to the Bible—If they were going to understand the Bible properly and to preach it effectively. This class is similar to a course in logic because its purpose is to help students develop the categories necessary for understanding the theological implications of the Word of God. If the Bible is to be understood in a thoughtful and practical way, theological method is helpful because it is like a tool that enables the Scriptures to be user-friendly as we study and interpret them for our day.

LEARNING GOALS:

Upon completion of this course, the student will have an introductory knowledge of critical theological method, enabling them to:

1. Describe how classical Greek\Roman philosophy influenced the manner in which the Early Christian Apologists and the Early Church Fathers did theology;
2. Articulate the impact of the Enlightenment upon modern theology, particularly the influence of Kant's philosophy and its contribution to such movements as liberalism, existentialism, and neo-orthodoxy.
3. Describe the rise of the modern historical consciousness, particularly the relation between critical history and Christian faith;
4. Understand the significance of the transition from premodern to modern and postmodern thought, with special reference to the shift from ontology (premodern) to epistemology (modern) to hermeneutics (postmodern);
5. Identify the key points in the transition from modern to postmodern paradigms, especially hermeneutical phenomenology, postliberalism, and deconstructionism;
6. Articulate the influence of postmodern science upon theological method;
7. Appreciate Wesley's methodical use of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience;

8. Apply critical theological method to the effective practice of Christian ministry in the postmodern age.

TEXTS AND REQUIRED READINGS

1. L. Wood, *Faith and History: A Study in Theological Epistemology and Methodology*. This work is being made available in manuscript-form on the library reserve shelf and online in the ST501-LW File which can be located on each student's Desk Top of First Class. Learning to think theologically assumes that one has a basic grasp of the substantive issues in theology. This means one must be acquainted with the way that theology has been done since the earliest days of Church history. The key methodological issue of Christian theology is the relationship of faith and history. This work is being written specifically for this new core course. It will be receiving further "finishing touches" during this semester. Your suggestions would be appreciated.
2. Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), pp. 125-225. Available in the bookstore. This is an excellent work on Wesley's methodological assumptions. Asbury Theological Seminary is a confessional school of theology. Though we do not think that all schools ought to be confessional, the founding fathers decided Asbury would be established primarily to train students in the Wesleyan tradition. Thorsen is a distinguished alumnus of Asbury, and his work on Wesley's methodology will introduce the student to the distinctive features of the Wesleyan way of doing theology.
3. Robert M. Augros and George N. Stanciu, *The New Story of Science*, preface by John Eccles (Chicago: Gateway Editions, 1984), chapter iv, pp. 53-82. Available only on the library reserve shelf. This book offers a postmodern discussion of the idea of God, showing how "the new story of science" is friendly toward the traditional view of God as Creator. It is an easy-to-read explanation of recent developments in science and their implications for theology. It is excellent for those who have no scientific background.

HERE ARE SOME "RECOMMENDED READINGS" THAT WILL OCCASIONALLY BE REFERENCED

1. Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth, Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997). An excellent overview of contemporary theology with a traditional Wesleyan focus.
2. E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is* (Archon Books, 1970). Mascall offers a traditional interpretation of Christian revelation in contrast to some modern alternatives, especially offering a critique of process theology with its view that God's personhood is always in the process of being formed.
3. R. G. Mitchell, *Einstein and Christ, A New Approach to the Defence of the Christian Religion* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987). This book is written for "young people" between the ages of 16 to 26 and for those who are "perplexed" by some of the theological implications of postmodern science. Chapter 2, "Clearing Terms and Concepts" (pp. 8-45), is especially helpful.

This chapter explains the idea of Einstein's theory of relativity and its implications for theology, especially the doctrine of eternity.

4. John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998). This book is a study in the doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ, incorporating contemporary perspectives as well as highlighting the classic tradition. Chapter 1, 2, and 3 (pp. 3-80) offer various methodologies for determining the meaning of Jesus' personhood.
5. Jürgen Moltmann, *Experience in Theology, Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). This work uses an autobiographical method for assessing contemporary theological trends. It describes Moltmann's personal interaction with the various theologies espoused in the postmodern period.
6. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991). This is a helpful introduction to the relevance of systematic theology, emphasizing the importance of coherent models of reality that assist in understanding the Triune Faith of the Church.
7. Ted Peters, "Theology and Natural Science," in *The Modern Theologians*, edited by David F. Ford ((Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), pp. 649-665. This essay offers eight ways of relating science and theology.

REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

1. Each student will read all the daily assignments prior to class sessions. It is expected that each student will stay up-to-date in assignments.
2. There are no formal tests.
3. Each student will invest between seven and one half to nine hours per week in outside preparation for this class, as stipulated by the ATS Catalog (see section entitled "Academic Information," subsection, "Preparation").
4. Each student will be assigned to a team. The purpose of these small groups is to provide students with a structured opportunity to develop more fully their understanding of the issues. Each team will have two to three members. The meeting place for these team discussions is online. Go to the First Class Desk Top and click on ST501-LW. You will find your TEAM ASSIGNMENT listed under that file name. You will also find a file called TEAM ACTIVITIES that will list study guide questions from each chapter of the text. Each team member will answer the respective questions *before each class session*, and then each member will give a brief response to the answers given by the other members of the team *after each class session*. The professor will monitor these discussions. The importance of posting these responses in a timely manner cannot be emphasized too much. Class time will include your online interactivity.
5. Each student will write an *interpretative* term paper on theological method (approximately 8-10 pages). It is assumed that each student knows the mechanics of a term paper. Please follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Be sure to *organize* the paper around a *purpose statement* with *supporting* documented sources. Each student should use at least three sources, which may include the assigned readings and texts for this course. An interpretative

paper means each student will engage personally with the implications and applications of theological method. One's informed opinions and personal judgments are important. I will also be looking to see how each student relates theological *method* to theological *praxis*. That is, how do you *apply* theological method to an *understanding* of Christian doctrine?

6. Each student who contracts for an "A" will develop "A Dictionary of Terms" as an ongoing process throughout the weeks of the course. This dictionary will consist of terms and ideas which are new to you and which will help you to gain a better understanding of theological method. The choice of terms and concepts to be included in this dictionary will be made by each student. This dictionary will contain at least 50 entries. As with any dictionary, the terms should be placed in alphabetical order. Final due date is Thursday, May 9.
7. Each student will read Chapter 4 of *The New Story of Science* (pp. 53-82).
8. Students who contract for a "B" grade will write a four-page essay on Wesley's theological method. Notice this is not a research paper, but rather it is an essay based on Don Thorsen's book, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral*. Due date is May 16.

GRADES:

For a grade of "C"—

- (1) Each student will answer the study guide questions. The purpose of the questions is to see if the student understands the material and can interact with its ideas.
- (2) Each student will faithfully participate in the online discussions.
- (3) Each student will complete the assigned readings in Thorsen's *Wesley's Quadrilateral* and Augros and Stanciu, *The New Story of Science*.
- (4) Each student will write an *interpretative* term paper on theological method (approximately 8-10 pages).
- (5) Due date is May 23.

For a grade of "B"—

- (1) Each student will do all the above requirements for a grade of "C."
- (2) Each student will write a four-page essay on Wesley's theological method, based on Thorsen, *Wesley's Quadrilateral*.
- (3) Due date is May 16.

For a grade of "A"—

- (1) Each student will do all the above requirements for a grade of "B"
- (2) Each student will complete "A Dictionary of Terms."
- (3) Due date is May 13.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

MODULE 1 – FEB 12

Topic:

1. Introduction to theological method with a focus on why the relation of faith and history is the critical issue of methodology

SECTION ONE: THEOLOGICAL METHOD IN THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS AND THE PRE-MODERN PERIOD

MODULE 2 – FEB 14, 19

Topics:

1. The Ancient and Pre-Modern Background
2. The Emergence of Historical Consciousness with the Hebrews and Critical Thinking with the Greeks

MODULE 3 – FEB 21, 26

Topics:

1. Athens or Jerusalem? The Academy or the Church? Christology and Cultural Forms and Ways of Thinking
2. The “Invention” of Scientific History with Herodotus. Is Biblical History “Scientific”?

SECTION TWO: THE MODERN HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

MODULE 4 – FEB 28

Topics:

1. Epistemological Dualisms in Modern Philosophy
2. The Beginnings of the Modern Historical Consciousness: So-Called Cartesian Historiography

MODULE 5 – MARCH 5

Topics:

1. Can A Single Event in History Entail Universal Significance? Special attention to be given to Lessing and Leibniz.

MODULE 6 – MARCH 7, 12

Topic:

1. Kant: The Fact-Value Dichotomy of Enlightenment Thought

MODULE 7 – MARCH 14, 19

Topic:

1. Hegel: Absolute Knowledge and World History

MODULE 8 – MARCH 21, 26

Topics:

1. Martin Heidegger: Truth as the Self-Disclosure of Being. An examination of existentialism as a transitional movement between modern and postmodern thought. Particular attention will be given to the philosophical sources of existentialist theology.

SECTION THREE: EPISTEMOLOGICAL DUALISMS IN MODERN THEOLOGY

MODULE 9 – MARCH 28

Topic: Modern Religious Epistemological Dualisms

1. Theological Alternatives to Kant
2. Kierkegaard's Contrast between Socrates and Jesus
3. Is universal reason or historical particularity the decisive element of Christian faith?

MODULE 10 – APRIL 9, 11

Topic: Modern Religious Epistemological Dualisms (Con't):

1. Martin Kähler, The Historical Jesus vs. the Historic, Biblical Christ.
2. Karl Barth, The Word of God and History.
3. Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus of History vs. Christ of Faith.
4. Gerhard Ebeling, "Pure Word" vs. "Mere Fact."

SECTION FOUR: A PANNENBERGIAN VIEW OF HISTORY AS THE COMPREHENSIVE HORIZON OF THEOLOGY--TRANSCENDING MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY

MODULE 11 – APRIL 16

Topics:

1. The Postmodern Challenge: The Openness of Truth and Reality
2. History as Reality

MODULE 12 – APRIL 18

3. History and the Self-Revelation of God

MODULE 13 – APRIL, 23, 25, 30

Topics:

1. History and Hermeneutics: Truth as the Textualization of Reality
2. Paul Ricoeur: "To Be Called Again"—A Post-Critical Theory
3. Theology As History—Transcending Modernism and Postmodernism

This model will review the modern and postmodern developments in hermeneutical theory from Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Bultmann, Gadamer, Pannenberg, with special attention to the hermeneutical phenomenology of Paul Ricoeur and reader-response theory, including also Jacques Derrida. Consideration will also be given to hermeneutical theories of narrative theology, postliberalism, liberation theology (Afro-American and Latin American), and feminist theology.

MODULE 14 – MAY 2

Topic:

1. Theology as History—Transcending Modernism and PostModernism

SECTION FIVE: THE NEW STORY OF SCIENCE AND ITS THEOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

MODULE 15 – MAY 7, 9

Topic:

1. New Scientific and Theological Paradigms: Doing Theology in a World of Postmodern Science
2. Does God Know the Future: Some Implications of Relativity Theory

Assigned Reading:

Robert M. Augros & George N. Stanciu, *The New Story of Science*, Chapter 4, pp. 53-82.

Highly Recommended:

1. Ted Peters, "Theology and Natural Science," in *The Modern Theologians*, edited by David F. Ford, pp. 649-665.
2. "The Creation of the Universe" (a video produced by PBS and available in local video stores in their educational division)

SECTION SIX: THEOLOGICAL METHOD IN THE WESLEYAN TRADITION

MODULE 16 – MAY 14, 16

Topic: What Is Distinctive About The Way John Wesley Did Theology?

Assigned Reading:

Donald Thorsen, *Wesley's Quadrilateral*.

May 20 – Final Week